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Gumshoeing and Gunning

One of the more popular sports in Washington and elsewhere these days is that of taking potshots at the Central Intelligence Agency. The CIA's intimate link with the Cuban disaster and its role in the deterioration in Southeast Asia recall its many past failures, dating back to the Korean War.

How much the CIA has been directly to blame, organizationally, for these failures is difficult to assess — this because of its ability to keep its organizational structure secret, even to the point where Congress freely gives it money without knowing where the money goes.

In the same way, the CIA's successes — and they must have quite a few — are hard to pin down. Stories are heard about strange and wonderful operations in Berlin, China and other hot spots, but these are supported only by the word of persons friendly to the CIA.

The CIA is further confusing to the average citizen because, by its nature, it tends in a so-called cold war that sometimes gets quite hot to side with seemingly dependable anti-Communists. Hence, some of the wildest-swinging attacks on it are by pro-Communists and anti-anti-Communists.

But it does seem clear to us that the CIA has grown too big for its britches. Its original mission, as we understand it, was to serve as an

over-all intelligence organization, a sort of super-headquarters for the numerous military and civilian intelligence agencies of various units of government.

This made sense, although the invariable Washington instinct to overdo any new bureaucratic undertaking soon became evident and now has flowered in a super-duper \$48 million CIA building near Langley, Va.

Where the CIA seriously began to go wrong, we think, was in getting too deeply involved in military and paramilitary operations. Granted, intelligence functions are basic in such operations. But the plans, training and operations — that is the gunning as distinguished from the gumshoeing — in a shooting match usually are placed in the hands of military specialists.

This evidently was not true in the Cuban failure. The whole job was handed over to the CIA, with catastrophic results.

We believe the CIA should be withdrawn to its supposed original mission — that of being a top-level intelligence and fact-gathering agency and wholly divorced from any command function in what has become euphemistically known as special operations, meaning guerilla-like, unconventional warfare. The military people have their own specialists to handle such operations, and their record has been one of success.

The above editorial also appeared

in the following other newspapers: NASHVILLE BANNER, TENN. — MAY 12, 1961
MUNCIE PRESS, IND. — MAY 9, 1961